

Internet Sweepstakes Cafe's...Already Causing Impact on Gambling Problems in Florida

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In just the past 9 months, the FCCG's HelpLine has received over four dozen contacts from gamblers and loved ones who are struggling with gambling problems as a result of the Internet Sweepstakes Centers. Of these callers:

- 84% of the gamblers were female
- 59% were Caucasian and 35% were African American
- 19% were retired and 25% were either unemployed or disabled
- 35% had committed illegal acts to finance their gambling
- 92% were suffering from depression and 18% had serious suicidal ideations
- 35% were older adults 55 years of age or older
- Average household income is under \$30,000

As HelpLine data reveals, the players these centers attract are a different demographic than what the FCCG typically sees in its general caller population. Internet Sweepstakes Center callers are primarily lower income, female, and a high percentage is older adults. These individuals may not have typically gambled at a casino, but with the internet cafes located in strip malls near neighborhoods and shopping, the temptation is sometimes just too great to pass up. Because of this type of "convenience gambling", it caters to a population that may not have made a trip to a gambling facility outside their neighborhood to gamble.

"For us the legality or illegality of these internet sweepstakes cafes is secondary – the impact is the same either way. Patrons at these establishments are losing control and losing significant amounts of money that most don't appear to have to begin with," states Fowler. "No matter how worthy the cause these operations may contribute to, the end result is that people are being harmed in order to provide these charitable contributions." If these cafes are determined to be legal, the FCCG encourages establishment of regulations similar to other forms of gambling in the State.